

**HB 5404: Study Ranked-Choice Voting in CT, Committee on Government Administration and Elections
March 4, 2020 testimony by Celeste Landry, 745 University Ave, Boulder, CO 80302**

Bio: I have been researching voting methods since 2012 and have given a variety of Voting Methods presentations including at the 2018 LWVUS convention, the 2019 Free and Equal Electoral Reform Symposium and the 2020 CO Dept of State Alternative Voting Method Stakeholder Group meeting.

Four Proposed Amendments: Amendments #1 and #2 below address language in the current text, but Amendments #3 and #4 provide for better and broader resolutions to the bill's limitations.

Issue #1. The description of ranked-choice voting (RCV) in HB5404 is too limited.

For instance, the 2018 Maine Congressional District 2 election would NOT fit the definition below:

*6 are defeated and until one candidate receives over fifty per cent of the
7 votes cast, and (3) the candidate receiving over fifty per cent of the votes
8 cast is deemed to have been elected to such office. Such study shall*

Example: The Maine CD2 winner, Jared Golden, did NOT receive over 50% of the votes cast (144,813 out of 289,624). More people preferred Golden's opponents to Golden. In the last round, Golden received over 50% of the votes if you only count the non-exhausted ballots. The definition of RCV in the bill effectively claims that more than two thousand cast votes were actually not cast!

2018 Maine CD2 election results: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/results/results18.html#Nov6>

Resolution: The definition should read

*6 are defeated and until one candidate receives over fifty per cent of the
7 votes cast on non-exhausted ballots, and (3) the candidate receiving over fifty per cent of the votes
8 cast on non-exhausted ballots is deemed to have been elected to such office. Such study shall*

Issue #2. Because ranked-choice voting (RCV) can refer to multiple voting methods, the term should not be used in legislation!

The version that appears to be intended in this bill has traditionally been called instant-runoff voting and is used in single-winner contests.

Example: RCV is a brand name used by FairVote for at least three DIFFERENT types of elections. Media reports often conflate the different versions leading to confusion and lack of understanding. See https://www.fairvote.org/where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used

- 1) Maine – uses instant-runoff voting (IRV)
- 2) Cambridge, MA – uses single transferable vote (a multi-winner version) – proportional
- 3) Payson, UT – piloted sequential IRV for a multi-winner contest – not proportional. [If the task force conducts a creditable study, it will note that Payson's method is inferior to the familiar plurality block voting. Full disclosure: My presentation at Free and Equal's 2019 Electoral Reform Symposium details the problems with Payson's method.]

Resolution: Replace all instances of "ranked-choice voting" with "instant-runoff voting."

Issue #3. HB 5404 should not limit itself to studying only ranked (aka ordinal) voting methods!

HB 5404 should also study rating (aka cardinal) voting methods, such as approval or score voting which allow multiple candidates to receive the same high rating or score vote.

Examples: Under approval voting you can vote for all the candidates you support. The candidate with the most votes wins. *The NY Times* made an approval voting endorsement supporting Klobuchar and Warren before the Iowa caucuses. Approval voting is better than the familiar plurality voting and is particularly easy to implement. In 2018 Fargo overwhelmingly voted to adopt approval voting.

Under score voting you give each candidate a score from 0 to the upper limit. The candidate with the highest total score wins. Advocates want Lane and Multnomah Counties in Oregon to adopt the two-step version called score runoff (aka Score Then Automatic Runoff – STAR Voting).

Resolution: Broaden the bill to study a variety of better voting methods and to ensure that experts of different methods are represented on the task force.

Issue #4. The scope of HB 5404 should be broad and flexible.

HB 5404 should consider whether different voting methods would be appropriate in different scenarios. We already use a variety of voting methods, even on a single ballot. HB 5404 should allow the task force to recommend different voting methods for different contests at different stages in the process, e.g., party nominations, primary elections and general elections.

Examples: Some contests are single-winner; others are multi-winner. IRV doesn't work for multi-winner contests, as Aspen learned in 2009.

Some elections are decided in a runoff; others are decided by plurality.

Multi-member boards may be elected in single-winner district elections, multi-winner district elections, single-winner at-large elections, multi-winner at-large elections or some combination. Changing from single-winner district elections to multi-winner at-large elections can allow for proportional representation on a board.

The most common multi-winner alternative voting method in the US is cumulative voting, a semi-proportional voting method. The more familiar plurality block voting does not promote proportional representation.

The Democratic presidential primary process uses a 15% threshold – yet another voting method. Primaries may be open, closed, or semi-open to voters of non-major parties.

Candidates from the same and different parties may all run against each other in a nonpartisan blanket primary or a so-called Louisiana primary.

Resolution: Expand the scope of study in HB 5404 to include a whole host of election options including multi-winner contests, the possible transition from single-winner to multi-winner contests, and proportional voting methods.